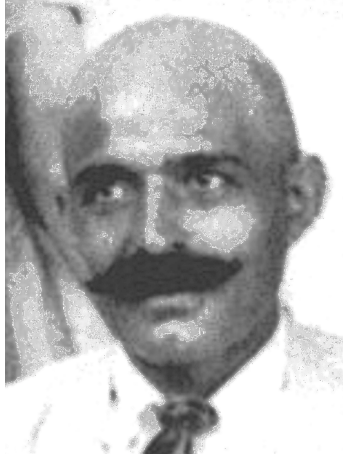


dedicated to all true seekers



Gurdjieffs sayings on Learning & Understanding

Compiled by Amar Shamo
amarshamo@web.de
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When working with pupils, I am like a coachman. If the horse follows the road, I give him free rein. If he goes to the right towards the ditch, I pull the left rein. If he goes to the left towards the hillside, I pull on the right one.

For teacher is important make student ask new questions.

In studying man we can study the whole world.

One can only give to a man just as much as he is ready to receive.

I never teach directly, or my pupils would not learn. If I want a pupil to change, I begin from afar, or speak to someone else, and so he learns.

There is a thousand times more value even in polishing the floor as it should be done than in writing twenty-five books.

If you know how to do one thing well, you can do everything.

It is by doing that man understands.

Man must understand this: his evolution is necessary only to himself. No one else is interested in it.

Must at once do in life, if wish normal man be - in all things.

There is no “nearly” in real understanding; is or is not.

The true sense of life is knowledge. All life, all experience, leads to knowledge.

Understanding grows only with the growth of being.

Feeling is more near to nature. Mind is nothing, in this case is only policeman, and only important as such.

Crumbs of truth are scattered everywhere; and those who know and understand can see and marvel how close people live to the truth, yet how blind they are and powerless to penetrate it.

Understanding, however, is the function of three centers. Thus the thinking apparatus may know something. But understanding appears only when a man feels and senses what is connected with it.

Understanding is the essence obtained from information intentionally learned and from all kinds of experiences personally experienced.

New things can be learned only up to the age of 17; what can be learned later is only learning in quotation marks, that is, merely a reshuffling of the old.

With sincerity man may look and see something. Sincerity with oneself is very difficult, for a thick crust has grown over essence.

The head is like an apparatus, it plays the role of police. But the center of gravity of your presence is in your solar plexus, which is the center of feeling. That is where things happen. The head is like a typewriter.

When begin know self already begin have possibility become genuine man. So first thing must learn is know self by this exercise, self-observation. If not do this, then will be like acorn that not become tree - fertilizer.

It is a common characteristic of human nature that a man sees the faults of others more easily than he sees his own. At the same time on the path of self-study he learns that he himself possesses all the faults that he finds in others. But there are many things that he does not see in himself, whereas in other people he begins to see them. But, as I have just said, in this case he knows that these features are his own. Thus other members of the group serve him as mirrors in which he sees himself.

General methods will be accessible to all, but subjective methods will be given in groups only to those who work, who try and wish to try to work with their whole being.

Those who are lazy, who trust to luck, will never see or hear that which constitutes real work, even if they remain here for ten years.

Do you think that anything is given in a completed form in schools? You look at this very naively. You must be cunning, you must pretend, lead up to things in conversation. Sometimes things are learned from jokes, from stories. And you want everything to be very simple. This never happens.

You must know how to take when it is not given, to steal if necessary, but not to wait for somebody to come and give it to you.

You can study a man better by his postures and gestures than by what he says.

Observe how people dance. Each nationality has its own way of dancing. You can always tell the nationality by the way a man dances. In the East, where traditions are much stronger, you can even tell which tribe or village people come from by the way they dance. In this way dances become like a kind of language by which people - unconsciously, of course - tell us about themselves. It is the same with everything. Each nation has a limited repertoire of movements which come from the impressions of childhood.

Mathematic is useless. You cannot learn laws of World Creation and World Existence by Mathematics. You must only look for Being. When you have Being, you will know all those things, without the need of Mathematics.

The realization of the fact that he has no aim and that he is not going anywhere is the first sign of the approaching awakening of a man or of awakening becoming really possible for him. Awakening begins when a man realizes that he is going nowhere and does not know where to go.

The work needs nothing external. Only the internal is needed. Externally, one should play a role in everything. Externally a man should be an actor, otherwise he does not answer the requirements of life. One man likes one thing; another, another thing; if you want to be a friend to both and behave in one way, one of them will not like it; if you behave in another way, the other will not like it. You should behave with one as he likes it and with the other as this other likes it. Then your life will be easier.

On the contrary, they ought to be difficult, unpleasant, and uncomfortable; otherwise they would not answer their purpose. Rules are the alarm docks which wake the sleeping man. But the man, opening his eyes for a second, is indignant with the alarm dock and asks: Can one not awaken without alarm clocks?

In addition to these fundamental demands it is of course presumed that the members of the group must work. If they merely frequent the group and do no work but merely imagine that they are working, or if they regard as work their mere presence in the group, or, as often happens, if they look upon their presence in the group as a pastime, if they make pleasant acquaintances, and so on, then their presence in the group likewise becomes completely useless. And the sooner they are sent away or leave of their own accord the better it will be for them and for the others.

If see another man fall down, when he must walk, you can pick him up. But, although to take one more step is more necessary for him even than air, he must take this step alone; impossible for another person to take it for him.

All this teaching given in fragments must be pieced together and observations and actions must be connected to it. If there is no paste, nothing will stick.

It is impossible to give to a man anything that could become his own without effort on his part. One can only show and direct, but not initiate.

One can only give to a man just as much as he is ready to receive.

Man is, in the full sense of the term, a 'miniature universe'; in him are all the matters of which the universe consists; the same forces, the same laws that govern the life of the universe, operate in him; therefore in studying man we can study the whole world, just as in studying the world we can study man.

To become free, to be liberated from slavery: this is what a man ought to strive for when he becomes even a little conscious of his position. There is

nothing else for him, and nothing else is possible so long as he remains a slave both inwardly and outwardly.

Without self-knowledge, without understanding the working and functions of his machine, man cannot be free, he cannot govern himself and he will always remain a slave, and the plaything of the forces acting upon him.

Therefore self-observation and self-study must, from the first, be accompanied by the struggle against the expression of unpleasant emotions.

If the photographs are taken successfully and if there is a sufficient number of them, a man will see that his usual conception of himself, with which he has lived from year to year, is very far from reality.

It must be understood that without outside help a man can never see himself.

Never be aggressive. Try always to understand the other person. Then you can help, not hinder.

Identifying is one of our most terrible foes because it penetrates everywhere and deceives a man at the moment when it seems to him that he is struggling with it.

'Identification' is so common a quality that for purposes of observation it is difficult to separate it from everything else. Man is always in a state of identification, only the object of identification changes.

Man cannot do anything sensible when he is in a state of identifying.

Freedom is first of all freedom from identification.

But if a man really remembers himself he understands that another man is a machine just as he is himself. And then he will enter into his position, he will put himself in his place, and he will be really able to understand and feel what another man thinks and feels.

This system is for those who have already sought and have burned themselves. Those who have not sought and who are not seeking do not need it. And those who have not yet burned themselves do not need it either.

Every man has a certain feature in his character which is central. It is like an axle round which all his 'false personality' revolves.

Take nicknames. Nicknames sometimes define chief features very well.

When a man begins to know himself a little he will see in himself many things that are bound to horrify him. So long as a man is not horrified at himself he knows nothing about himself.

To awaken means to realize one's nothingness, that is to realize one's complete and absolute mechanicalness and one's complete and absolute helplessness.

Only conscious work can be useful in all the undertakings of the Fourth Way.

A most important thing in the work is to remember that one came to learn and to take no other role upon oneself.

People do not value a thing if they do not pay for it.

People do not value what is easily come by.

Things which are easy never give energy.

Such is human nature. Man never on any account wants to pay for anything; and above all he does not want to pay for what is most important for him.

You now know that everything must be paid for and that it must be paid for in proportion to what is received.

To be able to keep a secret a man must know himself and he must be. And a man such as all men are is very far from this.

If a man knows how to make coffee well or how to make boots well, then it is already possible to talk to him. The trouble is that nobody knows anything well. Everything is known just anyhow, superficially.

People living on the earth can belong to very different levels, although in appearance they look exactly the same.

If a man in prison was at any time to have a chance of escape, then he must first of all realize that he is in prison. So long as he fails to realize this, so

long as he thinks he is free, he has no chance whatever. No one can help or liberate him by force, against his will, in opposition to his wishes. If liberation is possible, it is possible only as a result of great labor and great efforts, and, above all, of conscious efforts, towards a definite aim.

What can be serious for a man in prison who is condemned to death? Only one thing: How to save himself, how to escape: nothing else is serious.

Knowledge cannot come to people without effort on their own part.

For earning money, only 4 hours must work if intelligent - only donkey work 8 hours. But study is different - 44 hours a day study, because is bank for future.

In reality only self-initiation, self-presentation exist. Systems and schools can indicate methods and ways, but no system or school whatever can do for a man the work that he must do himself. Inner growth, a change of being, depend entirely upon the work which a man must do on himself.

A man is unable to keep watch on the whole of himself, that is, all his different sides. Only school can do this, school methods, school discipline a man is much too lazy, he will do a great deal without the proper intensity, or he will do nothing at all while thinking that he is doing something.

Schools of the Fourth Way demand understanding before anything else.
Results of efforts are always proportional to understanding.

There are schools which make use of narcotics in the right way. People in these schools take them for self-study; in order to take a look ahead, to know their possibilities better, to see beforehand, 'in advance,' what can be attained later on as the result of prolonged work. When a man sees this and is convinced that what he has learned theoretically really exists, he then works consciously, he knows where he is going. Sometimes this is the easiest way of being convinced of the real existence of those possibilities which man often suspects in himself.

You can struggle consciously only in proportion to the energy you possess.
You have batteries. If they are empty, you can do nothing.

External work goes on quite automatically and requires very little energy. Let life go on by itself. Keep your energy for work. Work needs a lot of energy.

Never believe anything you hear me say. Learn to discriminate between what must be taken literally and what metaphorically.

I ask you to believe nothing that you cannot verify for yourself.

Man must at all times mathematically hear, mathematically understand, mathematically answer. Only this is life. Always he must be with his I. Only then is he man not in quotation marks. No matter what he have in surroundings - people, noise, alcohol - always he must mathematically understand. Never lose self, even when drunk. He can be drunk, but never his I be drunk.

Not enough read my words - also must think about what read, otherwise empty will remain.

I am the same as other men, but I know and understand more.

It is far better to study one's own machine than to read about ideas.

The morning sun is best for us, the only time of day when the rays contain certain properties necessary for our understanding.

In order to help others one must first learn to be an egoist, a conscious egoist. Only a conscious egoist can help people. Such as we are we can do nothing.

In order to be understood by another man, it is not only necessary for the speaker to know how to speak but for the listener to know how to listen.

If a man reasons and thinks soundly, no matter what path he follows in solving these problems, he must inevitably arrive back at himself, and begin with the solution of the problem of what he is himself and what his place is in the world around him.

Knowledge is an inalienable property of a man; it cannot be more and it cannot be less. For a man "knows" only when he himself "is" that knowledge.

With a development of our being we can find a higher state of consciousness. Change of knowledge comes from change of being.
Knowledge in itself is nothing.

If anyone thinks that self-study will help and he will be able to change, he is greatly mistaken. Even if he reads all the books, studies for a hundred years, masters all knowledge, all mysteries - nothing will come of it.

This change depends on you, and I will not come about through study. You can know everything and yet remain where you are. It is like a man who knows all about money and the laws of banking, but has no money of his own in the bank. What does all his knowledge do for him?

When we speak of change, we presume the need of inner change.

Only when he knows himself, knows his inner structure, only then can he see.

Only if we know ourselves can we see others, for all people are alike inside and others are the same as we are.

Memory, attention, observation is nothing more than observation of one center by another, or one center listening to another.

We very seldom watch one center from another, only sometimes, perhaps one minute a day.

Sitting in your room you will not see anything: you should observe in life.

Understanding is perception not by one but by not less than two centers.

A large idea should be taken only with large understanding.

If you help others, you will be helped, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in 100 years, but you will be helped. Nature must pay off the debt. It is a mathematical law and all life is mathematics.

You can become a little more free in life, more secure, if you begin to be interested in all new things and remember them by new methods.

Change is a distant goal, requiring much time and labor. But study does not take much time.

It is necessary to learn to be unbiased, to sort out and analyze each action as though one were a stranger. Then one can be just. To be just at the very moment of action is a hundred times more valuable than to be just afterwards.

Education is nothing but a mask which has nothing to do with nature.

People prepare everything automatically, they make children function like bells which ring when one presses them, like an electric push button.

Never try to teach directly. Always with children begin from afar. Children must find for themselves; otherwise they will grow up as slaves.

But for serious man is not necessary find new answers, but new questions. Once you ask question, this mean you already have a very good idea about answer. For teacher is important make student ask new questions. This reason why education in your country and in modern times upside-down.

Teacher in school never make new student ask new question or try to discover new thing. Only answer old questions to which everyone already have answer or can find answer in self without effort.

Take the understanding of the East and the knowledge of the West - and then seek.

To know means to know all. Not to know all means not to know. To know all is not impossible. It is necessary for this to know even very little. But to know that little one must know pretty much.

Each of us is composed of two men - essence and personality. Essence is everything that we are born with; heredity, type, character, nature; essence is the real part of us. Essence does not change. I, for example, have a swarthy skin which belongs to my type; it is part of my essence.

Personality is an accidental thing, which we begin to acquire as soon as we are born; it is determined by our surroundings, outside influences, education and so on; it is like a dress you wear, a mask; an accidental thing changing with changing circumstances. It is the false part of man; and can be changed artificially or accidentally - in a few minutes by hypnosis or a drug. A man with a "strong personality" may have the essence of a child, overlaid by personality.

The most important part of our slavery is dependent upon factors which are crystallized in us and which are related to outsiders, to relationships with people unfamiliar to us. And in order to be able to be free, the first work in esoteric schools of all times, begins exactly with this question: "To decrystallize all the factors which are permitted by relations with others"

To a man who is searching with all his being, with all his inner self, comes the unfailing conviction that to find out how to know in order to do is possible only by finding a guide with experience and knowledge, who will take on his spiritual guidance and become his teacher. And it is here that a man's flair is more important than anywhere else. He chooses a guide for himself. It is of course an indispensable condition that he choose as a guide a man who knows, or else all meaning of choice is lost. Who can tell where a guide who does not know may lead a man? Every seeker dreams of a guide who knows, dreams about him but seldom asks himself objectively and sincerely - is he worthy of being guided? Is he ready to follow the way?

During our work, not a single man worked like a man. But for the Institute it is essential to work differently. Each must work for himself, for others can do nothing for him. If you can make, say, a cigarette like a man, you already know how to make a carpet. All the necessary apparatus is given to man for doing everything. Every man can do whatever others can do. If one man can, everyone can. Genius, talent, is all nonsense. The secret is simple, to do things like a man. Who can think and do things like a man can at once do a thing as well as another who has been doing it all his life but not like a man. What had to be learned by this one in ten years, the other learns in two or three days and he then does it better than the one who spent his life doing it. I have met people who, before learning, worked all their lives not like men, but when they had learned, they could easily do the finest work as well as the roughest, work they had never even seen before. The secret is small and very easy - one must learn to work like a man. And that is when a man does a thing and at the same time he thinks about what he is doing and studies how the work should be done, and while doing it forgets all - his grandmother and grandfather and his dinner.

Whenever someone questioned why Gurdjieff described himself to visitors as a rug merchant, he replied: "Why dealer in rugs? Answer simple. I sell knowledge. All is in rugs around you, all. Read! All life is hidden in design." The rugs on his floors and walls were texts, stories to be read. Rug or carpet designs, like folk stories, transmit traditional cultural lore from one generation to another. Gurdjieff had always insisted that story, myth, art and dance reduplicate objective language, and that symbols veil truths.

Man who all 'good' or man who all 'bad' is not whole man, is one-sided. Third thing is conscience; possibility to acquire conscience is already in man when born; this possibility given - free - by Nature. But is only possibility. Real conscience can only be acquired by work, by learning to understand self first. Even your religion - western religion - have this phrase "Know thyself". This phrase most important in all religions.

Gurdjieffs methods are directly opposed to all our comfortable habits. He was concerned to bring people to understand for themselves and with this aim always before him, he never made anything easy or tried to convince anyone of anything. On the contrary, he made the approach to his ideas difficult, both intellectually and emotionally. However hard in itself a theme might be to understand, he would always make it harder by incompleteness of exposition, by introducing inner contradictions and even absurdities, and by breaking off the study as soon as comprehension had begun to dawn and not returning to it perhaps for months or even years.

J.G. Bennett

Teachers usually surround themselves with an atmosphere of great seriousness and importance to give newcomers a good impression. With Mr Gurdjieff it was just the opposite: everything that could repel, even frighten, a new man was always produced. A newcomer had the opportunity to meet

Mr Gurdjieff and to talk with him, but at once there was put before him some obstacle to be surmounted. On the other hand, Mr Gurdjieff never let a newcomer go away empty-handed if he came with real questions and spoke about something that was of genuine importance to him.

Thomas de Hartmann

A few days ago a man gave him a cheque for one hundred dollars for 'his great work', implying by his manner that he was conferring a favour. Gurdjieff thanked him profusely and invited him to dinner the next day at a restaurant. There were ten of us at the meal. When the waiter brought the bill Gurdjieff disputed it, saying that he had forgotten to charge for something or other, and the waiter took the bill away. When he returned, Gurdjieff looked at it, paid it, gave the waiter a good tip and placed the bill on the table so that the donor could see it. I was sitting next to him. It came to just one hundred dollars.

C.S. Nott

Every activity in the Work showed clearly that the aim was never for outer results, but for the inner struggle. For example, Mr Gurdjieff once sent everyone to prepare the earth for the kitchen garden, but later the garden was abandoned. Very often he said that he was in a hurry to finish one or another job and that we had to do it as quickly as possible. I must say that this pressure to finish was always a stimulant, but this very stimulant provoked in us a kind of unconscious identification.

Thomas de Hartmann

When the demonstration ended I asked Mr Gurdjieff, 'How did everything go?' He looked at me, smiling, but said nothing. That gave me a strong inner experience, and from it I realized that in work of this kind we do not seek words of praise or encouragement. We have to fulfil the task as best we can and there should be no consideration for whether one is praised or not: that is the aim. Mr Gurdjieff so often said: 'Never think of results, just do.'

Thomas de Hartmann

I said: 'Mr Gurdjieff, what is it that makes it so difficult for me to speak to you, to ask you a question?' He looked at me without saying anything, then took my arm, and it was as if a warm flow of electricity passed through me. Getting up on to the wagon, he signed to me to sit beside him, and drove on. For half an hour we drove about while he gave directions to various people, then he gave the reins to me, told me to take the horse to the stable, and went into the house. We had not exchanged a word. But from that time I had a different feeling towards him, and though it never became easy for me to ask him questions, my attitude became different, and I discovered that if I pondered a question and was able to formulate it clearly, sometimes the question was already answered.

C.S. Nott

I remember one evening when he launched a stinging attack on one of my weak spots. I silenced my emotions. He abruptly stopped baiting me and, turning to Mme de Salzmann, simply remarked: "Doctor understand!" And I was gratified with that deep look which goes right into your soul, after which he smiled and went on to something else. So his behavior could be totally unpredictable, cordially setting us off on our way or turning us from our error toward ourselves or leading us back to ourselves.

Michel Conge

I do not think that Gurdjieff should be looked upon as a master whose object was to instruct disciples in a doctrine, but rather as a teacher trying to shape the intellect and character of a chosen number of pupils, whom he regarded as children under his care. One does not tell children the whole truth, one gives them carefully prepared parts of the truth that one hopes will further the development of their souls, and sometimes one even invents stories, such as Father Christmas, to encourage the children to express themselves.

Denis Saurat

Compiled by **Amar Shamo**
amarshamo@web.de
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Amar Shamo 2015